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**Group Work**

**Creating successful group work is not simply a matter of putting students together. Students do not automatically become more involved, thoug**

Group Work benefits

**Policymakers and researchers see small group work as a way to improve attitudes to-**

**ward school, foster achievement, develop thinking skills, and promote interpersonal and intergroup relations.**

**Researchhas shown that successful groups promote (a) student exchanges that enhance reasoning and higher- order thinking;(b)cognitive processing such as rehearsing, organizing, and integrating information; (c) perspective- taking and accommodation to others' ideas; and (d) accep- tance and encouragement among those involved with work (Bossert, 1988-1989).**

**Group work design**

**The effects of group work depend on how the group is organized, what the tasks are, who participates, and how the group is held accountable. Teachers must consider the**

**purposes in designing group work and address potential problems of process if group work is to be successful.**

**Teachers need to have clear purposes when using group work, and they need to be aware of some of the many limitations and considerations to successful use.**

**For group work to succeed, educators must consider norms, tasks, help giving and seeking, and group composition.**

**Rationale for group work**

**One major source comes from recent successes in American business that are often claimed to be the result, in part, of changes in the way workers and management interact.Small-groupproblem-solving has replaced top-down rigid management. To some, it follows that if small**

**groups are going to be the problem-solving units in businesses, schools should have the same arrangement so that students can learn early in their lives how to work in small groups.**

**Jigsaw**

**In Aronson's "jigsaw,"the learning material is divided into small portions, and each group member works with members of other groups to study and become expert in one segment of the material.**

**These "experts"return to their original groups to explain their portion. The group is held accountable for learning all the material. In other programs, such as Sharan's "group**

**investigation," ways to ensure cooperation are not pre- scribed. Products can be created by individuals or developed by the whole group. Students may be rewarded for their own work, or rewards may be interdependent and**

**determined by group performance**

**Competitions and rewards**

**In some, competition among groups is included; in others, rewards are not conditional**

**on how other groups performed.**

**Effecive group work practices**

**Effective group work requires students to share ideas, take risks, disagree with and listen to others, and generate and reconcile points of view. These norms do not necessarily pervade classrooms. Students are used to working individually, being rewarded for right answers, and competing with each other for grades. Placing students in groups does not mean they will actually cooperate. There is consider- able and disturbing evidence that students often do not behave prosocially. One problem is failure to contribute. When groups create a single product and receive one grade, students sometimes do not do their fair share. They try to get a free ride or engage in social loafing. Moreover, students who do most of the work feel exploited and re- duce their efforts or work on their own. Forceful students may also dominate discussions, pressure others to accept their perspective ,or force conclusions on the group. Others may ridicule and exclude group members or discount their**

**contributions. Rejected members are likely to be humiliated and withdraw. Managing interpersonal lrelations often detracts from learning content, as well. Attempts to promote positive norms include pretraining for cooperation, including listening and resolving conflicts, teaching students to appreciate the skills and abilities of others, and**

**using rewards that promote interdependency.**

**Students can benefit when they share ideas, accommodate others' perspectives, and give and receive help. This is likely to occur when tasks entail problem-solving and involve more than one right answer, not when students complete worksheets aimed at improving low-level skills or recall. When students connect their ideas and explain them to others or when students generate problem solutions based on information they have gathered, more discussion and elaborated responses will be needed to help peers understand their perspective. Such desirable interchanges are uncommon. Palinscar, Ander- son, and David (1993) have shown that students need considerable assistance in the process of argumentation and have developed a program to help students systematically consider alternative explanations for phenomena and offer justifications for their reasoning. Moreover, negotiating such complex tasks requires considerable skill to plan, monitor, and evaluate progress.**

**Students needing Help**

**Help-seekers do not always benefit from the help they get. The help must be timely, elaborated, comprehensible, cogent, and must be correct to avoid reinforcing misconceptions. Effective help is automatic. Students may not know how to help effectively and may require special training to learn how to elaborate their thinking. Suggestions for helping students craft good explanations include giving examples, creating analogies, and using multiple representations. Moreover, students may not be aware that they need help nor seek it when needed. They may not know how to ask questions that identify their problem, or they may be unable to make use**

**of help they receive. More troubling though are students who remain silent or withdraw because they believe that needing help indicates incompetence (Nelson-LeGall, 1985).**

**Inequality in group work**

**Some argue that interpersonal relations suffer when there is a single group grade; failing groups have lower self perceptions, less satisfaction, and blame low achievers for the group's performance (Ames, 1981). Slavin (1990) asserts that individual accountability and group rewards are essential to ensure cooperation.**

**Collaboration**

**its that are presumed to accrue from small-group learning. Recent research portrays collaboration as a key to help students construct knowledge and to introduce them to disciplinary language, values, and ways of knowing. The disciplines represented in school subjects have special vocabularies ,bodies of knowledge, and methods for gathering evidence and evaluating findings that novices need to learn. Collaborative learning that engages students in the construction of shared meaning will help advance the learning of disciplinary knowledge and understanding (Brown, 1995).**

**The aim is to build communal knowledge through conversation. Collaboration can occur within a whole class, among groups in a class, and with people and groups outside the classroom. As students converse, they are ex- posed to and draw on the expertise of others and learn from them (Bruer, 1995)**

**Collaborative tasks tend to be open ended and answers are not predetermined. Knowledge generation is emphasized as students pose questions or define problems. They gather information and data, interpret findings, and use evidence to draw conclusions.**

**Technology with group work**

**Programs also support synchronous conversations in which students converse by typing. Technology also helps support and keep track of dialogue among students and serves as a public**

**archive of conversations. Software (e.g., CSILE, Scar- damalia & Bereiter,1991) specifies and organizes elements of conversations such as generating hypotheses or predictions and commenting on others' work. Unlike E-mail systems then, these collaborative software applications are**

**expressly designed to support the creation of shared understanding. In addition, conversations can be stored, reflected on, and reacted to, creating a common knowledge base that is open to review, comment, and manipulation (i.e., searching conversations by date, subject,or author) by many--not**

**just the conversants. Experience indicates that students who do not typically engage in classroom discussion participate in these computer-based, classroom-wide conversations. The newest generation of collaborative environments supports conversations but goes substantially further by providing a "place"to which students can go.**

**More importantly, effective in- structional strategies are needed to help students use such systems productively. While considerable researchhas ex- amined small-group collaboration, there is no comparable body of experience for the use of technology-supported small groups.**